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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000724

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
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P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
PARIS FOR RWALLER
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OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEANON: GEAGEA: DON'T GIVE SYRIA A ROLE IN
LEBANES CABINET FORMATION

REF: A. BEIRUT 723

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 645

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In a June 29 meeting with the Ambassador, Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea said although Majority Leader Saad Hariri's formation of the new Lebanon First parliamentary bloc was "not good," March 14 was not dead. Collaboration between Hariri and himself remains strong, Geagea averred. He believed Walid Jumblatt's recent statements contradicting his March 14 allies were "a problem," but stressed it was important not to challenge Jumblatt on his positions, which he took based on regional political considerations. While Geagea supported a cabinet structure giving March 14 an absolute majority of ministries, he felt it likely that Hariri would cede one March 14 minister to add to those associated with President Michel Sleiman, resulting in a "virtual" blocking third for the minority. Regardless of how the new government took shape, Geagea encouraged the U.S. to push its allies such as Saudi Arabia not to consult with Syria on the cabinet formation process, in which Syria should have no role.

[1](#)2. (C) Geagea said the weekend clashes between Hariri's Future Movement partisans and members of Nabih Berri's Amal party spread more widely than was reported in the media, and assessed that the only way to prevent these sorts of clashes in the future was to have LAF intelligence, whose current chief (BG Edmond Fadl) Geagea does not support, round up the offenders. Other March 14 contacts believed the clashes were a sign of tensions that should be addressed, while Berri advisor Ali Hamdan downplayed their significance, saying communication between the political leadership on both sides was excellent. End summary.

LEBANON FIRST BAD,
BUT MARCH 14 STILL ALIVE

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by Pol/EconOff, called on

Samir Geagea at his home in Maarab June 29. Geagea advisor Elie Khoury also attended the meeting. Geagea marveled at the proliferation of new political blocs forming in the aftermath of the elections, noting that individuals from both March 14 and March 8 were trying to build blocs to justify their participation in the National Dialogue. He said Hariri's formation of the new Lebanon First parliamentary bloc was not a good thing, particularly because his inclusion of March 14 Christians from Beirut 1 district was a betrayal to voters there who wanted independents. He said the LF had supported these candidates, but would not work for them in the future. (Comment: In a brief conversation before the meeting, Khoury justified to the Ambassador LF's own courting of independent Christians from Zahle, so Geagea's argument seems somewhat disingenuous. End comment.)

¶4. (C) Despite Geagea's dissatisfaction with the Lebanon First bloc formation, he still believed March 14 was a viable force, largely because of good cooperation between Hariri and himself. Geagea noted that he had gone to see Hariri at his residence in Qoreitem June 28, and said they were coordinating their positions on the formation of the new government. He acknowledged that March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt had been "a problem," most recently declaring he would not participate in a government that supports privatization, despite the views of his March 14 partners. Nonetheless, said Geagea, it was important not to try to confront Jumblatt under the current circumstances, since such an approach was likely to backfire. Geagea assessed that Jumblatt was taking his positions based on the regional political context, and his belief that he no longer had

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unconditional support from the West and Saudi Arabia. Jumblatt would continue to reach out to the opposition and to Syria until he had evidence the international community was coming back to March 14, at which point, believed Geagea, Jumblatt would return to the March 14 fold.

CABINET FORMATION:
NO ROLE FOR SYRIA

¶5. (C) Geagea thought Hariri should stick strongly to his demand for 16 out of 30 cabinet seats for March 14, ensuring the alliance an absolute majority in the government, and leaving 10 ministries for the opposition, with four for President Sleiman. Nevertheless, after meeting Hariri on Sunday, Geagea sensed that Hariri would be willing to bend on the 16 number, and give the President five ministries. In practical terms, he suspected, this would mean the President would appoint three Christian ministers of his own choosing, plus a Shia minister close to the opposition, and a Sunni minister close to March 14. Essentially, said Geagea, this scenario would give March 14 a "virtual" majority and the opposition a "virtual" blocking third.

¶6. (C) Noting that former Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Abdelaziz Khoja was in Syria for consultations, Geagea said he knew nothing about the result of Saudi-Syrian discussions on Lebanon (even after having met with Saad Hariri the day before, who has close and frequent contact with Riyadh). He stressed to the Ambassador that Syria should have no role in Lebanese internal politics. He encouraged the U.S. not to discuss Lebanese cabinet formation with the Syrians, and asked that the U.S. administration discourage its allies, including Saudi Arabia, from doing so as well.

SUNNI-SHIA CLASHES

¶7. (C) Geagea pointed out that his most recent meeting with Hariri coincided with the weekend clashes between Future Movement and Amal supporters in West Beirut (Ref A). Highlighting that fighting was taking place only blocks from Hariri's residence, he said the clashes were not isolated, as

reported in the press, but spread quickly through Sunni and Shia neighborhoods. Geagea blamed the clashes on continued inaction by the intelligence services of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in tracking down known miscreants, and he reiterated his previous arguments in favor of the replacement of the current LAF G-2 Intelligence Chief Edmond Fadl (Ref B).

18. (C) Separately, in a June 29 luncheon with PolOff and Senior LES Pol Advisor, Future MP Nuhad Mashnuq said that in response to the clashes, Beirut MPs were planning to meet the Grand Mufti of the Republic to call for Beirut to be a "city without arms." March 14 MP Okab Sakr believed such clashes would continue until a Saudi-Iranian dialogue took place. Meanwhile, Ali Hamdan, an advisor to Nabih Berri, downplayed the significance of the clashes with the DCM, saying that Hariri and Berri had good lines of communication open to control such events. He dismissed the view that the violence was a form of pressure from Syria to intimidate Hariri as he begins negotiations on a cabinet by claiming Hariri's supporters had acted first.

SISON